



Galt had grand plans for Guelph, and wanted a magnificent church built on the hill. He also wanted a Catholic Bishop to be stationed in Guelph, and writes, "I had some reason to hope that Mr. Weld of Lulworth Castle (now Cardinal Weld in Rome) would come to Upper Canada, and probably make it his residence; being desirous to allure him to Guelph, I had this in view in converting the receiving house into a habitation." Galt's plan to attract Bishop Weld to live in Guelph was not fulfilled, but Bishop Macdonell certainly had great influence on the history of the Catholic Church in the city, a contribution commemorated not only by the street named after him, but also by the modern Bishop Macdonell High School.

An important early settler was John Owen Lynch, an Irishman who was brought in from New York to be the settlement's blacksmith. A wood cabin was constructed for him and his family at what is now the corner of Gordon and Farquhar streets, and it was there that Father Campion, the first priest to take care of the parish, celebrated Mass. Father Campion was the military

chaplain at Niagara and was responsible for the pastoral care of the Catholics in what is now western Ontario. He would visit each settlement from time to time, and it was he who celebrated the first Mass in Guelph on August 26, 1827. That first Mass was followed by the first wedding in the town, as he married Christopher Keogh and Ann Green. Mr. Keogh had been one of the workmen with John Galt at the founding of Guelph.

In the early years of Guelph the Catholics were mainly Irish. They were few and poor. From 1827 to 1835 there was no church. Until 1831 Mass was celebrated in the home of Mr. Lynch, and after that in a schoolhouse, which was also used on Sundays by the Methodists and by the Presbyterians. During this period Father Cullen and Father Cassidy cared for the Guelph Catholics, but did not live in the town. Father Cassidy was responsible as well for the much larger parish in Dundas, and would only visit Guelph occasionally. Finally, by 1835, the parishioners were able to construct a small wooden church on the hill, and, being mainly Irish, they dedicated it to St. Patrick. It was the first painted structure in the settlement, and was used until October 10, 1844, when it was destroyed by fire.

In 1837 Father Thomas McGivney became the first resident pastor in Guelph, and was responsible as well for the territory from Mount Forest to Goderich. The parish was still extremely poor. Father McGivney was involved, along with several Protestant ministers and other citizens, in the establishment of the Guelph School Board, and in 1846 he dedicated a small stone church, St. Bartholomew, which replaced St. Patrick's. The cornerstone of St. Bartholomew is now found in front of The Basilica of Our Lady, and reads: "D.O.M. (Deo optimo maximo) memoriate, Beati, Bartholomaei, Apostoli, hanc, novam, ECCLESIAM, PRIMA flammis devorata, AEDIFICAVERUNT, guelphi, necnon, torontinae, DIAECESIOS, FIDELES. MDCCCXLV." ("To God, the best and greatest. The faithful of Guelph, of the diocese of Toronto, have built this new church, in honour of the blessed apostle Bartholomew, the first church having been consumed in flames. 1845. ") Father McGivney was killed in a riding accident on October 17, 1846.

In 1841, Guelph came under the jurisdiction of the new Diocese of Toronto, which was separated in that year from the Diocese of Kingston.

The years following the death of Father McGivney were difficult for the parish. Many Irish immigrants arrived fleeing the potato famine in their homeland and they were destitute and often suffering from disease. Tensions between the religious groups in Guelph increased.

Father Peter Schneider was briefly pastor in 1847. He was remembered for his work with the sick during an outbreak of fever among the immigrants in Guelph. Father Schneider was followed by Father Simon Sanderi. Father Sanderi was born in Bavaria, and was a member of the Redemptorist Order. He was a zealous man who cared for his parishioners, and especially for many newly arrived immigrants, though he had difficulty adapting to their Irish culture. He was also noted for his sermons, which would often last two hours. Unfortunately, lack of funds and increasing parish debts led him to press the parishioners heavily for money, but they, themselves poor, did not accept that and in 1850 he was forced to leave. He became a hermit on a island in Puslinch Lake for a couple of years, and then became a monk at the Trappist Monastery of Gethsemani.

A new era in the history of the parish began in January of 1852 when Bishop Charbonell of Toronto appointed Father John Holzer, S.J., to be Pastor in Guelph. The parish was to be under the care of the Jesuit Order for about 80 years, until 1931.

Father Holzer was a great organizer. In 1853 he began work on a large stone schoolhouse, which later became the convent, and he wrote to Bishop Charbonell: "all over the mission now, we have only the motto of Archbishop Hughes: "The schoolhouse first and the Church afterwards. But the troubles and difficulties are very great indeed!" Despite some local opposition, a Separate School Board was organized and on January 11, 1854, the Catholic parents of Guelph elected three trustees. On January 16, 1854, Patrick Downey began teaching boys and girls in a room of the unfinished convent building.

Father Holzer invited the Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary to come to Guelph. On June 10, 1856, four Loretto sisters arrived. Mother Berchmans Lalor, the Superior, and St. M. Ignatia Lynn, Sr. M. Stanislaus Hennigan, and Sr. M. Ita Cummins. They stayed at the home of a local

parishioner, Mr. John Harris (who later became Mayor of Guelph) until 1857, when the convent was completed. Mr. Downey moved his class of boys to the rectory, while the Sisters taught the girls in the convent. Thus began Catholic education in Guelph.

In 1856 the Diocese of Hamilton was established, with Bishop John Farrell as its first bishop, and Guelph came under the jurisdiction of the new diocese. During these years the Jesuits of Guelph were responsible for the territory north and northwest of the town to Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. They established 56 mission stations in that area. Among these missions were Arthur, Kenilworth, Ayton, Karlsruhe, Chepstow, Deemerton, Neustadt, Elora, Formosa, Hanover, Markdale, Mildmay, Riversdale, and Owen Sound. Under the direction of Father Holzer churches were built in Hanover (1852), Fergus (1854), Morriston (1856), Deemerton (1856), Hespeler (1857), Mount Forest (1857), Acton (1857), Georgetown (1858), Neustadt (1860) and Karlsruhe (1860). Gradually, over the years, the mission stations attached to Guelph became independent parishes.

The great missionary who travelled tirelessly establishing the Church throughout the vast area of the Guelph Mission was Father Caspar Matoga, who died at the age of 33 in 1856. He was born in Poland in 1823, and came to Guelph on September 1, 1852. Except for a few months, when he had the use of a horse to carry clothing and other necessities for the poor whom he encountered, Father Matoga walked on his missionary journeys, covering the circuit of Mission stations five or six times a year. He would arrive in the morning, hear confessions, baptize, marry, anoint the sick, settle disputes, and teach catechism. Then at noon he would celebrate Mass, preach a sermon, give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and continue with pastoral visitation throughout the afternoon. He endured great hardships and exhaustion, and survived two attempts on his life. Often he would simply lie down by the side of the road, to get a bit of rest, and then move on. On one of his trips this saintly priest became very ill, and walked 30 miles to Guelph, where he died on August 21, 1856. He is buried in the Church of Our Lady, beneath the Canadian Martyrs chapel. He was known as “indefessus animarum venator” – the indefatigable hunter of souls.

In Guelph itself, Father Holzer continued his activities. In 1857 he built the rectory and completed the convent. He intended the rectory to be the site of Ignatius College, and on May 7, 1862, a Bill was passed incorporating the College. But there were not enough students, and in a few years the College closed. In 1862 Bishop Farrell gave the Jesuits 6 acres of land for a residence and a future college. In 1861 Father Holzer founded St. Joseph's Hospital. He asked the St. Joseph Sisters of the Hamilton Diocese to be responsible for the Hospital, and on November 21, 1861 Sr. Alphonsus Sr. Antoinette, and Sr. Ignatius arrived to begin this work. At first they cared for the sick in a small stone building known as the Gate house, with room for 16 patients. In 1862 and 1877 this building was expanded, and a new Hospital was built in 1895. A new wing was added in 1925, and another in 1951. In 1956 a home for the aged was constructed. Today, St. Joseph Health Centre is a fully-accredited, not-for-profit provider of resident long-term care, complex care, and rehabilitation services.

On October 4, 1863, Bishop Farrell laid the cornerstone for a huge church which was meant to occupy most of the hill. The inscription in the cornerstone read: "His Lordship Right Rev. John Farrell, D.D., First Bishop of Hamilton, blessed and laid the first stone of this church, to be built to the honor of God, under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, and of St. Bartholomew, Apostle and patron of the Parish, the 4th day of October, the Feast of the Holy Rosary of the B.V.M., A.D., 1863. Pius IX, Pope; Flavian Turgeon, Archbishop; Very Revs. Ed. Gordon, V.G., John Walsh, V.G., Revs M.M. O'Shea, S. Maheaut, Ed. Gowalski, J. Holzer, S.J., Sup., Db. Petit, S.J., J. Archambault, S.J., N. Sorg, S.J., assisting Victoria, Queen; Lord Monck, Governor-General of Canada; H.W. Peterson, Mayor of Guelph."

Construction of the church was begun, but the project was abandoned after a debt of \$20,000 had been accumulated. It simply seemed impossible to continue. Legend has it that Father Holzer was a friend of the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, who supplied the funds, and that when Maximilian was shot in 1867 the funds stopped, and so did the building of the church. It is unlikely that this legend has a basis in fact. The problems in financing the church arose long before the death of Maximilian. It may well be that Father

Holzer, searching for ways to solve the financial problems of the parish, mentioned a desire to seek a contribution from Maximilian.

Father Holzer's pastorate ended in 1864, when worn out by his labours, he suffered a stroke. In 1875 he visited Guelph for the last time, and died at Georgetown University, Washington, on April 23, 1888, a few months before the opening of the present church.

In 1874 Father P. Hamel, S.J., began plans for the Church of Our Lady. He appointed Joseph Connolly as architect. Connolly designed many churches in 19th century Ontario, including St. Peter's Cathedral in London, though the Church of Our Lady is considered to be his masterpiece.

On July 10, 1876, Bishop Crinnon of Hamilton turned the sod for the new church, and on July 5, 1877, Bishop Conroy, Apostolic Delegate to Canada, laid the cornerstone. Construction began at the rear of St. Bartholomew, and was to continue for over ten years. In 1883 Rev. W. Doherty became pastor. On September 12, 1885, he supervised the burial under the chapels behind the sanctuary of the new church of Fr. Thomas McGivney, Fr. James Sherlock, S.J., Fr. Caspar Matoga, S.J., and Sr. Ursula Heenan, all of whom had been buried in the cemetery which had been beside St. Bartholomew.

In 1887 work had reached the stage at which St. Bartholomew could be demolished, and on October 10, 1888, almost two thousand people attended the ceremony as the Church of Our Lady was dedicated by Bishop Dowling of Peterborough (since the see of Hamilton was vacant at the time). The next year Bishop Dowling became Bishop of Hamilton. Bishop Walsh of London preached the sermon, and pointed out that though there were many magnificent old cathedrals constructed by kings and men of wealth, the Church of Our Lady was built by the generosity, sacrifice, and labour of the poor immigrant settlers of Guelph, "by money raised from the workingmen who had built our canals and railways – servant girls, mechanics and other hard-working people."

In 1908 the present altar was erected, the walls were painted with murals, and the stained glass windows were installed. Bishop Sharretti, the Apostolic Delegate, came to bless the completion of the interior decoration of the

Church. The organ, from Casavant Freres of Quebec, was added in 1919. The exterior of the church was not finished until November 13, 1926, when the two towers were completed. This work was accomplished during the pastorate of Father F. Wafer Doyle, who was Pastor for 18 years, from 1912 to 1930.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Church of Our Lady was no longer a mission centre. The many missions which had been founded from Guelph were now established as parishes on their own, and soon the same process would take place within Guelph itself. In 1911 a chapel was opened in a private house on Alice Street, to serve as a mission for the care of Catholics in that part of the city; in due time, in 1924, Sacred Heart Church was built and in 1930 it became the center for an independent parish, the second in Guelph.

By 1931 the time had come for the end of the Jesuit pastoral care of the Church of Our Lady. Over the years the Jesuits had sought to relinquish the parish, and Father Hingston, their Provincial, once more asked Bishop McNally to place it in the hands of the diocesan priests. The Bishop agreed, and on September 6, 1931, Father J. A. O'Reilly, a priest of Hamilton Diocese, became Pastor.

Father Hingston, in a statement read out to the parishioners, explained the reason for the change: the main mission of the Jesuits was missionary or educational work, and since the College once established at the parish had closed long ago and since the parish was no longer a missionary center, it was time for diocesan priests to assume responsibility for the parish while the Jesuits moved on to work more in keeping with their particular call.

Father O'Reilly was pastor for twenty-five years, the longest pastorate in the history of the parish. During his time as pastor two more parishes were separated from the Church of Our Lady to begin their life as distinct communities: St. Joseph's parish, in the western part of the city, in 1952, and Holy Rosary parish, across the river in the eastern part of Guelph, in 1956. The Church of Our Lady parish, which once extended to Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, had now reached its present boundaries.

There were three schools on the grounds of the church: St. Agnes School, built in 1877, St. Stanislaus School, built in 1883, and the Loretto Academy, a High

School for girls. Up until 1924 the Loretto Sisters had run a boarding school in the convent, but that was discontinued in 1924 to free space for classrooms for the increasing number of day students. This was followed in 1926 by the construction of the Academy, attached to the convent. On October 10, 1944, Father O'Reilly announced plans to build a Catholic High School for boys. In 1953 the Loretto Academy became co-educational, and in the following year Notre Dame High School was opened at the bottom of the hill.

In 1949 Father O'Reilly encouraged some members of the parish to form Our Lady's Parish (Guelph) Credit Union Limited, within the Ontario Credit Union League. Membership was originally limited to parishioners, and volunteers offered financial services to the members from an office in the basement of the Church on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings. The Credit Union grew rapidly and amalgamated with the Sacred Heart Parish Credit Union. Office staff and a full time manager were hired, and offices were built near the Church on Cork Street. In 1970 the parish Credit Union joined several others in the city to form the Guelph Community Credit Union, and in 1980 a further amalgamation with the Guelph-Wellington South Credit Union formed the Guelph-Wellington Credit Union Limited.

In 1956 Father John Noonan became pastor. St. Bernadette school was established in 1960, St. Paul's in 1964, and Our Lady of Lourdes in 1965. The Loretto Academy and Notre Dame High School were united to form Bishop Macdonell High School in 1962 and an addition was made in 1967 linking the two buildings.

Several changes were made in the property as well. In 1958 a new entrance to the Church from Macdonell Street was constructed and in 1960 landscaping was done on the Northumberland and Dublin Street sides of the property and a new statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was placed on the front of the Church to replace the original one, damaged by weather. In 1967 there was a major renovation of the Church, with a repainting of the whole interior. In 1973, during the pastorate of Father W.L. Ryan, a trust fund was established for the perpetual care and preservation of the Church.

On June 12, 1977 the Catholics of Guelph marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Catholic life in Guelph by holding a procession through the center of the city, followed by a Holy Hour.

Throughout the parish's history several organizations have assisted in enhancing the material and spiritual welfare of the community.

In March of 1872 a Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was established in the Parish to care for the needy, offering them both material assistance and spiritual encouragement. It has continued this work faithfully over the years, and has recently opened a used clothing and small articles store and a used furniture warehouse.

In 1920 Bishop Dowling established the Catholic Women's League in Hamilton Diocese, and in February of 1921 a branch of the CWL was organized in the Church of Our Lady parish. During the next several years the parish CWL contributed \$10,000 to the fund for the building of an addition to the Loretto Academy. In 1934 Fr. O'Reilly disbanded the CWL at the Church of Our Lady and established in its place the Confraternity of the Holy Family, which was, however, closely associated with the diocesan CWL – so much so that in 1940-41 Miss R. McElderry, of the Church of Our Lady Parish, was Diocesan President of the CWL and its National Secretary. On October 21, 1952, the Parish branch of the CWL was re-established. It is involved in many works of service locally, across Canada, and around the world.

The Knights of Columbus, founded in the United States by Father McGivney in 1882, has been present in Guelph since April of 1910, when the Guelph Council of the Knights of Columbus 1507 was established. The Knights met at various places in the city until 1931 when they opened a new clubhouse at the corner of Dublin Street and Waterloo Avenue. They moved to new quarters in 1976, and the old clubhouse became the home of the Guelph Civic Museum. Over the years the Knights have participated in many worthy projects.

Other groups, such as the Holy Name Society and the Legion of Mary, have contributed over the years to the life of the parish.

In 1986 Msgr. J.H. Newstead, Vicar General of the Diocese of Hamilton, was appointed Pastor. In the same year Bishop Matthew Ustrzycki, the auxiliary bishop of Hamilton, took up residence in the parish. This fulfilled the desire of the founder of the city, John Galt, that a Bishop reside in Guelph.

On October 10, 1988, the parish celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the opening of the Church of Our Lady. This majestic church is the architectural masterpiece of the city of Guelph, and a source of pride for all its citizens. But the parish is more than the church. From the early days of poverty and struggle, through the great missionary era when this parish extended far to the north, to its present situation as a Catholic community in the center of Guelph, the parish has been alive with the spirit of the Gospel. From any place in Guelph one can see the great stone church on the hill, as we look at it may we keep always in mind the words of Scripture. "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:4-5)